



September 7, 2018

**Chairman Ajit Pai**  
**Commissioner Mignon Clyburn**  
**Commissioner Michael O’Rielly**  
**Commissioner Brendan Carr**  
**Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel**  
445 12th Street SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners,

As we approach the first nationwide Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) test this month, we are reminded of the all too recent failures of the WEA system. The false missile threat in Hawaii has forever changed the way the public looks at emergency alerts and the need for accurate emergency alerts has never been greater. Public safety officials from across the country have watched as the California wildfires have continued to burn and how WEA has, and has not, been used to warn the public. We truly appreciate the steps that the FCC has taken to enhance the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system over the last year, but there is still more that needs to be done regarding false alerts, reporting and checks and balances on the system.

*Additional Reporting Measures are Needed*

It is generally agreed amongst all public safety partners that additional reporting on WEA/EAS systems is needed. Additional information from wireless carriers on message delivery and delivery failures is crucial to identifying what areas are being over and under alerted during an emergency. When the commission’s new geo-targeting enhancements go into effect in 2019 it will help improve alert originators ability to target messages, but they will still not have an accurate picture of who received or didn’t receive the message. This is serious enough problem in states like California that they have passed legislation (California Senate Bill 833) statewide to ensure reporting and tracking of WEA messages is mandatory.

*EAS Plans Must Help Prevent and Mitigate Effects of False Alerts*

The threat of false alerts has eroded the trust between public safety and residents that emergency messages can be relied upon. It is crucial that state level EAS plans have measures in place for how to prevent false alerts in the first place, and how to quickly mitigate any effects of false alerts that are sent out. The Authenticating Local Emergencies and Real Threats (ALERT) Act of



2018 has been approved by the U.S. Senate and is under review in the House. The ALERT Act would address minimum standards for IPAWS usage and validation in mass notification software tools used by public safety officials. It would also require DHS to develop clear procedures for alerts regarding missile threats. This is good first step toward addressing the issue, but the commission needs to take further action to review state and local plans to ensure protections are in place against false alerts.

#### *Factors Preventing or Delaying WEA Messages Must be Addressed*

We have just passed the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Harvey in our jurisdiction and are reminded of the challenges we faced in trying to use WEA as a reliable tool for alerting the public. The ineffectiveness of geo-targeting kept our officials from sending out targeted messages during Harvey. Our Alert Originators must have confidence in the reliability and capability of the system in order to effectively use it as a tool during emergencies. The ability for users to “opt-out” of emergency alerts also weakens the reliability of sending WEA messages for public safety officials. If people are allowed to opt-out, WEA is no longer a way to universally reach everyone in a jurisdiction/area. The recent wildfires and mudslides in California have shown that there are gaps in coverage of the WEA system. In addition to reporting on messages delivery, wireless carriers must increase the coverage and accuracy of WEA messages to ensure lives are not lost as there are still people who do not receive alerts.

#### *FCC Must Take Action to Address Inconsistencies*

There are several things that the FCC can do to improve the WEA system and help public safety officials better serve their communities. Better coverage and accuracy by wireless carriers has been mentioned numerous times because it is crucial in ensuring there are less gaps in the system. Providing public safety officials with message delivery data can help improve regional/local emergency alerting systems in reaching the public. Removing the opt-out option on mobile devices while balancing proper training of alert originators will ensure messages are received without creating public alert fatigue. False alerts must be prevented and dealt with swiftly if we are to regain public trust. We realize this is a daunting task, but the commission must find ways to work with public safety officials to ensure we don’t have another issue like Hawaii. Lastly, the commission and the public safety community need to look at emergency alerting holistically. While this FNPRM is focused on WEA and EAS, there are countless other sources of information to the public and new technology that can be utilized for alerts. The recent report for CSRIC VI provides a framework for a wider view of emergency alerts as we move forward.



The active steps the commission is taking in seeking input from public safety officials regarding these critical issues has not gone unnoticed. We will continue to work with wireless providers to find solutions to these problems, but look to the FCC to put forth rulings that move these issues forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "FSJ", followed by a horizontal line extending to the left.

Francisco Sánchez, Jr.  
Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator  
Harris County